INTRODUCTION

THE SHORT DRIVE from the White House to the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency can begin on Constitution Avenue. The route crosses the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge into Virginia and merges onto the George Washington Memorial Parkway. After tracing the big bend in the Potomac River, the parkway crosses over Spout Run and begins to climb. In a few hundred yards, the spires of Georgetown University, academic home to many a former intelligence officer, and recruiting ground of many a future one, come into view over the cliffs on the opposite bank. Above them, dominating the skyline of Northwest Washington, D.C., is the white cube of the Russian embassy, a few blocks from a mailbox where CIA turncoat Aldrich Ames and his Russian handlers left chalk marks to signal that he was prepared to drop another batch of secrets at a hiding place nearby, and pick up a bundle of cash. Not far from the parkway, in a drab, unmarked office in the Rosslyn section of Arlington, CIA officials met in 1991 with United Nations weapons inspectors to develop a plan for uncovering and destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD).[1] At the second rest stop on the right, high above the Potomac, a Nixon White House emissary in 1973 offered former CIA officer James W. McCord Jr. executive clemency for his involvement in the Watergate burglary in exchange for his silence. Twice, in late-night meetings at the rest stop, McCord refused. McCord conveyed a message of his own: if President Nixon sought to avoid blame for Watergate and let the CIA take the fall, the Agency and its defenders would fight back, a threat that McCord, in due time, carried out, a major step in the downfall of the Nixon presidency.

After the Chain Bridge Road exit ramp, on the approach to the Agency entrance in Langley, Virginia, a sign marked "WARNING: Restricted U.S. Government Installation" interrupts the pretty suburban scenery. Occasionally, a small cross and bouquet of flowers can be seen placed along the median by the turn lane into the Agency grounds. These tokens of love and mourning mark the scene of a double murder in early 1993 when a lone Pakistani man, enraged by the presence of American troops in Muslim holy lands, opened fire with an AK-47 assault rifle on a line of cars carrying CIA employees and contractors awaiting the turn signal into the Agency grounds.

In the post-9/11 world, with the awareness that the hatred of one killer signaled the intent of a global jihadist movement, the drive into the CIA grounds is a multi-step procedure. Visitors are asked to give their name and affiliation at a squawk box a hundred yards short of what looks like a turnpike toll plaza. If a visitor is expected, his name, Social Security number, and date of birth are already entered into the CIA security service's computer, and he is handed a small color map of the CIA grounds. Trees, shrubs, and lawns designed to give the Agency headquarters a campus feel do not hide the barbed-wire fencing, hydraulic metal barriers, and concrete stanchions that are more evocative of a medium-security prison. From the access road, the complex of headquarters buildings looms in the distance. To the left, a set of smokestacks marks the CIA furnace where classified papers discarded in "burn bags" are disposed of by janitors with security clearances. On a lawn closer to the headquarters stands a chunk of the Berlin Wall, gift of a reunited Germany in recognition of the years during which Berlin had been the central arena of the Cold War. Spray-painted graffiti on the concrete slab includes what appears to be a line from a Jimi Hendrix song: ". . . and the wind cries . . ." Other graffiti, also, oddly, in English, include the words "Freedom" and "Democracy" and a paraphrase of President Ronald Reagan's June 12, 1987, speech in Berlin: "tear down the wall."[2] The words evoke a yearning for freedom from tyranny by people in a place where the CIA fought communism over four decades. In fact, the paint was applied not in Berlin but at Langley, to dress up an otherwise non-descript slab of concrete. As such, it stands as the CIA's last propaganda gambit against the East Bloc, a final psychological operation, an inside joke cooked up at headquarters to enhance an otherwise featureless souvenir of the Cold War.

In the CIA's white marble lobby stands a life-size bronze statue of General William "Wild Bill" Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services,

the World War II predecessor of the CIA, and symbol of the daring and risk-taking the CIA cherishes and, from time to time, emulates. On the opposite wall, dozens of deeply engraved stars represent the Agency officers killed in the line of duty since the CIA's founding in 1947. Some, though not all, of the names appear in a book of remembrance in a glass case below the stars.[3] Down the corridor is a gift shop where employees and escorted visitors can buy the ever-popular CIA-logo golf balls, money clips, highball glasses, sweatshirts, and towels—not a bad kit, come to think of it, for a fictional, if not actual, spy. There are CIA Christmas ornaments with porcelain portraits of past directors Allen Dulles and Richard Helms, semi-deities at agency headquarters. Another popular ornament features a miniature U-2 spy plane dangling in a gold ring above tiny maps of Cuba and the USSR.

The seventh-floor office suite of the CIA director includes a windowless, wood-paneled conference room decorated with the seals of the various military and civilian intelligence agencies over which, most agreed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA director had insufficient control. Here in January of 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell, CIA Director George Tenet, and a cluster of senior intelligence analysts put together the now-infamous briefing for the United Nations Security Council in which Powell, citing information since discredited as almost entirely erroneous, presented the case that Iraq's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction warranted immediate military action. The office of the CIA director affords a view of the trees, or, one might say, the forest, flanking the parkway. Here in 1961 a young Porter Goss, newly arrived at the Agency from Yale by way of the Army and looking ahead to a career as a CIA field officer, chatted with Dulles—a legend even then—and watched in horror as the CIA director nearly ignited his tweed coat while trying to light his pipe. Decades later, Goss would return for a brief and stormy turn as director, an emissary from the White House under orders to make that journey from Washington to Langley and clear out Agency officers who were regarded with deep suspicion among the second President Bush's inner circle as adversaries of the president.

The short distance between the White House and the CIA appears greater when measured in other ways. And the tension between these two power centers during the course of just over a decade—from about the time that unpainted slab of the Berlin Wall arrived at Langley to the day when Colin Powell and a room full of harried intelligence analysts assembled a case for war in Iraq—is the subject of this book. During the dozen or so years from

1990 to early 2003, from the time of the Soviet breakup and the Persian Gulf War to that of the 9/11 attacks and the war in Iraq, the CIA experienced a series of tremors that weakened its foundation, though the cracks were not always visible at the time. Many of these took on the label "intelligence failure"—sometimes because the CIA had failed, other times because the White House or Congress found it expedient to make it seem as if it had. These controversies—allegations that the CIA missed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the CIA's performance before and during the Persian Gulf War, the Aldrich Ames spy scandal, the belated realization of the al-Qaeda threat, battles over the capabilities of "rogue state" adversaries, the intensifying struggle against Islamic terror, and the near-total misjudgment of Iraq's arsenal—unfolded during a decade of transition and distraction for the United States. The economy, the Republican takeover of Congress, crises in Somalia, the Balkans, and Rwanda, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal and impeachment of President Clinton all deflected the country's attention from the gradual political and substantive weakening of the intelligence community during a time when its services were most urgently needed. Problems at the CIA seemed to be matters for Washington insiders to confront during this period, and while intelligence failure garnered headlines, the consequences of failure seemed detached from the lives of average Americans. The 9/11 attacks and the course of the war in Iraq would change that.

The CIA reports to Congress, the military, and other arms of the executive branch, but most of all to the White House, and specifically the president. And it does so almost always in secret. On most mornings, the first thing a president reads comes from the CIA.[4] These arms of government are the CIA's "customers," in the fashionable term, and the president is first among them. This allusion to the CIA as something akin to a business, with customers who have both needs and demands that must be served, gained in currency during the business-centric 1990s. Intelligence reports freighted with caveats, footnotes, and minority views that ate up the time of busy executives were out, as were estimates of future developments that predicted so many different possibilities as to predict nothing at all. Though the term intelligence "customer" or "consumer" remains in use to this day, the idea that the CIA served only a rarified group of cleared officials within the government was shattered by the 9/11 attacks and by the disastrous miscalculations in the run-up to war in Iraq. More than at any time since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, intelligence failure reached directly into the lives of average Americans. Whereas in the

early 1990s intelligence reform panels were driven by presidents and staffed by retired generals and Cabinet officers, in the post-9/11 world intelligence reform was resisted by the White House and driven by average Americans, people who, for the most part, had little connection to the military and intelligence nerve centers in Washington—that is, until their families suffered profound loss in the 9/11 attacks.

Throughout the years between the end of the Cold War and 9/11, warning signs of serious trouble in the intelligence community had been accumulating. Budget cuts were an important ingredient, but there were other stresses as well. Severe turbulence beset the Agency's executive suite, where five directors held the top post in the first seven years of the 1990s. A series of events beginning with the CIA's flawed performance leading up to and during the Gulf War, its failure to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the eruption of the Aldrich Ames spy scandal led to a pronounced drop in confidence in the CIA among both Democratic and Republican leaders in the executive branch and Congress. These and other fissures led to a raft of panel studies and legislative efforts to reform the intelligence community, but with little resulting effect.

For most of the CIA's history, disclosure of its misdeeds or failures have alternately titillated the public, served various political agendas, or fueled conspiracy theories. Some Americans still believe the CIA had something to do with the assassination of President Kennedy and the crack cocaine epidemic of the mid- to late-1980s. The political left spent the latter years of the Cold War focused on the CIA's role in propping up corrupt and abusive Latin American juntas as a bulwark against communism and welcoming hosts for American business interests. The admissions in the mid-1970s about CIA spying on Americans and CIA involvement in a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro gave political traction to the liberal criticism of the agency. On the right, anti-Soviet hard-liners argued that the reining-in of the CIA following the congressional investigations of 1975 had de-fanged U.S. intelligence, leaving it ill-equipped to deal with an aggressive, expansionist adversary. One offshoot of this argument was the Reagan administration's backing of a massive CIA operation to funnel weapons and training to Mujahadin fighters in Afghanistan. At the same time, the right also aired suspicions that the CIA, far from being a tool of reactionary politics in the developing world, was insufficiently aligned with the anti-Soviet agenda and tended to underrate the menace of Soviet military power.

The patterns of intelligence failure and correction did not change with the end of the Cold War. Institutions fail; their failures are exposed to criticism; political pressure is brought to bear; personnel are punished and organization charts redesigned; and bureaucracies alter their behavior, taking extra care not to repeat the mistakes that received the most criticism. The risks inherent in the business of intelligence make it a bureaucratic endeavor particularly prone to failure. On the operations side, it involves covert activity, often in hostile environments against adversaries trying to mislead it. Analysts, meanwhile, struggle to fit the scattered secrets the intelligence community has managed to collect into complex political dynamics and make informed predictions at times when even the adversary may not know his own future course of action. These dynamics existed at the CIA both before and after the Soviet collapse. Nevertheless, several factors make the dynamics of intelligence failure stand out in the post–Cold War period.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the mission that had defined the CIA since its creation in 1947 and that had taken up the majority of the intelligence community's energies was suddenly gone. In addition to having to explain its failure to foresee the collapse of the Soviet monolith, the CIA faced the even more daunting challenge of defining a new mission in turbulent and uncertain times, all while its own capabilities were shrinking rapidly with post–Cold War downsizing. It is important to recall that while intelligence failure followed by critical assessment of the CIA occurred at various times throughout the Cold War, the structures of scrutiny were vastly different. The House and Senate oversight committees that serve as arenas for so much criticism of the intelligence community today did not exist until 1975. Before then, the CIA operated in a largely closed world. A budget meeting concerning the CIA in the 1950s was likely to involve a one-on-one conversation between the director and Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, chairman of the Armed Services Committee. The investigations of Watergate and intelligence activities of the mid-1970s by the congressional Church and Pike committees shined a harsh spotlight on the CIA, but the focus was on CIA misdeeds—assassination plots, spying on Americans and the like—not on CIA incompetence at the job it was supposed to be doing.[5] The Reagan presidency saw a strenuous effort to restore public belief in the need for a robust clandestine service that resulted in a temporary revival of morale at the CIA. While there were furious internal debates on questions of intelligence analysis, particularly disagreements over the severity of the Soviet threat, there was a broad

public consensus on the importance of countering that threat. Even the Iran-Contra scandal of the late 1980s landed only a glancing blow on the CIA, since the Reagan administration had gone to some lengths to keep the Agency's professional bureaucracy out of the information loop regarding the clandestine arms sales to Iran and the funneling of the proceeds from those sales to anticommunist Contra forces in Nicaragua.[6]

The dynamics of intelligence failure changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union because the geopolitical situation changed. The 1990s began with a debate about whether the CIA was even necessary. Then came the shocking revelation in 1994 that Aldrich Ames, a senior CIA officer in the Soviet espionage division, had been spying for Moscow for nine years and had exposed dozens of Soviet insiders working secretly for the CIA, at least nine of whom the KGB promptly executed.[7] A steady stream of intelligence failures in the 1990s occurred in every facet of CIA activity, from intelligence collection to analysis to counterintelligence to covert operations. The decade saw disclosures of CIA dealings with unsavory Latin American paramilitary groups and drug dealers; the breakup by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein of a covert operation to topple him from power in 1996; the ill-considered targeting by the CIA of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan in 1998 and the unintended targeting of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999; the failure to foresee India's nuclear test and a North Korean test of a three-stage rocket in 1998; the inability to uncover plots to bomb U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 or the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000; and haste, followed by indecision, in the response to those attacks.

Congressional and public attention to these lapses was amplified by the turbulent political environment in which they occurred, as the White House shifted from Republican to Democratic control and back and Congress went from Democratic to Republican control in asynchronous fashion. Serious though these lapses were, it was possible to view them in one way or another as inconsequential to the well-being of average Americans. However serious Aldrich Ames's treachery, for example, the KGB's liquidation of U.S. intelligence sources did not prevent the Soviet Union from collapsing. The CIA has disputed the charge that it failed to foresee the Soviet collapse. But even if the argument prevails that the CIA failed in this regard, the consequences of that failure seem limited compared to the benefits of the Soviet collapse itself, a development for which the agency must receive at least some measure of credit. By failing to recognize Soviet weakness, the CIA helped the Reagan administration frighten the nation into a far larger defense buildup than was

necessary. I believe the claims by Reagan's supporters that the defense buildup "caused" the Soviet collapse and was intended to bring about that end are greatly exaggerated and ignore the arguments they made at the time—that the buildup was needed to counter a strengthening, not weakening, Soviet Union. However, the buildup did contribute to the overwhelming coalition victory in the Persian Gulf War, which reestablished the U.S. military credibility worldwide that had been so badly damaged by defeat in Vietnam. The Gulf War and the U.S. military interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, though beset by intelligence lapses, were ultimately successful operations.

The intelligence lapses prior to the 9/11 attacks and the realization that the war in Iraq had been sold on a foundation of faulty intelligence brought the public into the national debate about intelligence in an unprecedented fashion. No official body has unequivocally said that better intelligence could have prevented the 9/11 attacks, but an overwhelming consensus formed around the idea that massive intelligence failure had preceded 9/11 and that massive intelligence reform must follow it. The general public could see in the 9/11 attacks and the war in Iraq a straight-line connection between intelligence failure and the deaths of thousands of Americans. The lapses that allowed the 9/11 plotters to keep their deadly plan secret, the gross *over*estimation of the threat posed by Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction and *under*estimation of the danger of insurgency and civil war that might follow the collapse of his regime, contributed to events that cost thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. These devastating events were not caused by the CIA. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda launched the 9/11 attacks, and the CIA had warned, generally, that we were in danger; Saddam Hussein adopted the policy of strategic ambiguity that complicated efforts to accurately assess the strength of his armaments; President Bush, not the CIA, made the decision to invade Iraq; some CIA analysts had warned, tentatively, of civil unrest in Iraq after the fall of Saddam, and so on. But the integral role of intelligence in these events and their impact on average Americans brought the public into the debate over how the United States steals secrets and interprets intelligence in a way unimaginable just a few years ago.

THE CULTURE OF FAILURE

The seemingly limited and transient consequences of the earlier post–Cold War intelligence failures and the profound consequences of the failures related to September 11 and the war in Iraq are connected, however. The events

of the 1990s both stemmed from and led to a steady erosion of intelligence capability, contributing to a series of intelligence lapses and alleged lapses and to a consequent decline of confidence in the intelligence community that left the CIA critically weakened. These processes fed off and fueled one another, leading to a fatal cycle of error, criticism, overcorrection, distraction, and politicization. The term "culture of failure" refers not to alleged CIA incompetence, which, though it occurs in cases we will explore, is often overstated by the agency's critics. Rather it refers to an atmosphere of declining confidence in the abilities of U.S. intelligence to do its job. This diminished faith in the abilities of the CIA existed at the CIA itself, as well as in the executive branch and Congress.

At the beginning of the 1990s, national security debate focused on managing the "peace dividend" that would come from trimming spending on defense and intelligence that had been overwhelmingly geared toward countering the now-nonexistent Soviet threat. The CIA had indeed failed to foresee the Soviet breakup until it was almost upon us. To Agency critics such as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, this massive failure stemmed from a Cold War mindset that led to gross overspending on weaponry and an unnecessary aggravation and prolonging of superpower tension. It was a mindset with a political history, dating back to the "Team B" exercise of the mid-1970s, in which hawkish critics of the policy of détente toward the Soviet Union brought forth an alternative interpretation of Soviet weaponry and policy to counter the CIA's "Team A" interpretations. Some of these same hawks, having overridden CIA circumspection about the Soviets and implemented a massive peacetime military buildup during the Reagan presidency, would return in the 1990s to push the national missile-defense program, once again beginning their campaign with an attack on CIA analysis that downplayed the missile threat. Many of these same hawks, some now carrying the "neoconservative" label, would hold key levers of power as the second Bush administration made its case for invading Iraq. In the early 1990s, Congress waved off Moynihan's proposals to break up the CIA and distribute its component parts among various government agencies such as the Defense and State Departments. But even before the Soviet collapse, spending on intelligence was declining, and, with the exception of a single year, the trend continued through the 1990s. The way the cuts were made, as much as the cuts themselves, cast a shadow that would reach to the intelligence failures of 9/11 and the Iraq invasion. Training of new field officers ground to a virtual halt by the mid-1990s, as did the recruiting of

analysts with expertise and knowledge of languages spoken in the parts of the world that were spawning the nation's emerging enemies.

Though this study focuses on the CIA in the dozen years from the end of the Cold War to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, it reaches back into the Cold War to examine some of the CIA's work on the Soviet threat in order to better judge the validity of the charge that the CIA had missed the Soviet collapse. I also look at CIA analysis of Iraq in the 1980s to lay a foundation for understanding the intelligence misjudgments about Iraq at the time of the Gulf War, and the lasting impact of those misjudgments years later as the second Bush administration contemplated going to war against Iraq once again. Both these episodes contributed substantially to the post–Cold War perception that the U.S. intelligence community was woefully underperforming, a perception that prevailed even within the CIA itself. So it was that in the early 1990s U.S. intelligence was struggling to define its post–Cold War reason for being at a time when al-Qaeda, unbeknownst to the CIA, was planning and executing its first attacks on U.S. interests. To be sure, this atmosphere of doubt, this culture of failure, had an impact that was not always negative. Concern about the intelligence community led to earnest though largely unsuccessful efforts throughout the 1990s by congressional oversight committees, blue-ribbon commissions, and the intelligence community itself to redefine and reform the intelligence system.[8] On balance, however, the culture of failure afflicting U.S. intelligence was like an old injury, a weak point that kept hobbling the intelligence community as the decade unfolded toward the 9/11 attacks and war in Iraq, two of the greatest national security disasters in U.S. history. Again and again the episodes examined in this book point to a combination of real intelligence failure and persistent, sometimes exaggerated doubt about the capability of the intelligence community that fueled developments detrimental to U.S. interests.

One of the great ironies of the 1990s was that U.S. intelligence, in combination with U.N. inspectors and a policy of constant military vigilance, *succeeded* in ridding Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. It was, as we now know all too well, a success that went entirely unnoticed by the intelligence community that helped bring it about. The CIA did not trust its own abilities, and no one else in the national security community, whether Republican or Democrat, was prepared to argue otherwise. The perception of failure, real and exaggerated, led the CIA to a position in 2002 in which its own analysis rested on the assumption that it could not fully perceive what the Iraqi adversary was doing.

Concrete events reinforced this culture of failure. Throughout the 1990s, at repeated turns, the intelligence community, in concert with the U.N. inspectors, was caught by surprise with the discovery of some new secret about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that had been deliberately concealed by Saddam's regime. Early in the decade it was the discovery of a robust nuclear weapons program, far more advanced than the CIA had estimated. In mid-decade, U.N. inspectors discovered irrefutable evidence that Iraq had embarked in the 1980s on a hitherto unknown biological weapons program. As the inspectors were unraveling the Iraqi biological program in 1995, another Iraq-related controversy enveloped the CIA—the inadvertent detonation by an Army demolition team of Iraqi chemical munitions at a place called Kamisiyah immediately after the Gulf War. The furor among Gulf War veterans over the CIA's failure to adequately share with the military what it knew about chemical weapons at Kamisiyah reenforced the contention that whatever the CIA and the U.N. inspectors were finding in Iraq was a mere hint of what Saddam Hussein was actually hiding.

As the perception of American victory in the Cold War coincided with the perception of intelligence failure, so the swift U.S.-led victory in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, a conflict the CIA had predicted would be lengthy and costly, left the Agency on the defensive. And as with the end of the Cold War, the perception of intelligence failures—whether those failures were real or politically expedient exaggerations designed to cover the mistakes of others—cast a shadow down the decade with negative consequences for U.S. national security. Evident problems in the intelligence community's ability to get the right spy satellite imagery to war-fighters in a timely fashion during the Persian Gulf War led to renewed investment in spy satellites and imagery analysts in the 1990s, forcing steeper cuts in human intelligence manpower and slowing the recruitment of people with new and badly needed skill sets. Politics, a sense of responsibility to the intelligence officers who served through the Cold War, and failure to adequately perceive the emerging terrorist threat meant that staff cuts at the CIA were accomplished by attrition, and hiring of much-needed experts on the new threats was severely constrained. The result was a surplus of Soviet expertise in the intelligence community at a time when the CIA needed a much larger cadre of Middle East specialists.

Amid declining capability and intensifying and politicized scrutiny, the mistakes made by the intelligence community cast shadows forward in time. The failure to see Saddam's aggressive intentions toward Kuwait in 1990 led U.S.

intelligence to see nothing but aggressive intent in Iraq's subsequent foreign policies. The intelligence community's erroneous prediction that the Persian Gulf War would cost thousands of American lives contributed to an atmosphere of optimism a decade later as it evaluated the prospects for the conquest of Iraq. The CIA's embarrassing failure to see how far Iraq had progressed in the 1980s toward nuclear weapons capability fueled the conclusion that failure to detect Iraqi nuclear activity in the 1990s reflected Saddam's deviousness and skill in concealing a continuing and aggressive nuclear program.

Even when adversaries revealed their intentions and capabilities, as in the al-Qaeda bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, Serbia's suppression of Kosovar Albanians in 1999, and the suicide attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000, intelligence seemed inept at guiding the nation to an appropriate response. Flawed intelligence led to President Clinton's decision to launch cruise missiles on a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan and on a suspected al-Qaeda leadership meeting in Afghanistan after the embassy bombings in Africa. The evidence that the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant was manufacturing nerve gas grew shakier by the day after the strike. And the al-Qaeda meeting did not take place, almost certainly because the terrorists canceled it after realizing that U.S. intelligence had detected their plans. The next year, during the Kosovo crisis, a U.S. B-2 bomber targeted 2,000-pound precision satellite-guided bombs onto the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, owing to an almost absurd series of lapses in target identification at the CIA. Chastened by these embarrassing misfires, the Clinton White House, with the concurrence of the CIA's leadership, declined to take military action on several occasions when intelligence reports appeared to pinpoint the location of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The surprise accompanying the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests and North Korea's three-stage rocket test in 1998 helped foster a belief in the CIA's incompetence. The assumption advanced by Donald Rumsfeld in an examination of the missile threat from North Korea and other "rogue" states was that the CIA could no longer be counted on to detect the threats arrayed against the United States. It was this judgment, and Rumsfeld's role in moving the missile defense program forward, that returned him to prominence and led to his being named secretary of defense in the George W. Bush administration. Adversaries adept at "denial and deception"—the concealment of weapons programs and other secret activities from U.S. intelligence—would be able to spring surprises on Washington, of which the India-Pakistan nu-

clear tests and North Korean missile launches were but two examples. The only safe thing to do, went the argument, was to assume the worst and act accordingly. It was precisely this philosophy that would guide Bush administration decision-making leading up to war in Iraq.[9]

The Bush team genuinely believed that Iraq had some banned weapons. U.S. commanders on the march north to Baghdad in March 2003 were surprised when Saddam's troops didn't launch chemical projectiles at the coalition forces. But the administration considered Iraqi weaponry to be a manageable threat. The problem was the future and what Iraq might do with its oil money once it was free from the crushing international sanctions imposed by the United Nations after the 1991 Persian Gulf War and aimed at forcing Iraq to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction. North Korea, meanwhile, was far enough along in its nuclear weapons development that it would not be safe to invade, and Iran did not yet have nuclear weapons but was too strong for an easy invasion. The 9/11 attacks, while not linked to a state-sponsored terror group, nevertheless showed how vulnerable the United States was to that type of attack. Without worrying particularly about the quality of the evidence against Iraq, the Bush administration wanted to send a message to would-be state sponsors of terrorism. And if a message of toughness was to be sent to Pyongyang and Tehran, best send it through Baghdad, the weakest spoke on the "Axis of Evil." This, at least, was the internal logic, if not the case actually presented to the American people.

The low regard for the CIA among the officials who came to power with George W. Bush in January 2001 made it easier to use the agency as a prop in the run-up to war on Iraq. And the Agency's embattled posture during the 9/11 Commission's investigation of its failure to uncover the 9/11 plot made it much more politically risky for the CIA to raise skeptical questions about whether the threat posed by Iraq was as serious as the White House alleged. An agency lambasted for missing clues that might have unraveled the deadliest terror plot in history was now handed the mission of interpreting a threat based on abundant clues about deadly weapons in the hands of a murderous dictator. To the White House, there could be no question how to respond, and despite internal arguments over details of the intelligence case, the CIA met the demands of its customer.[10]

Intelligence agencies tend to lean toward the worst-case scenario, so it was not difficult for Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives of the second Bush administration to prod the CIA in the direction of making the WMD case for

war on Iraq. But the administration's preemption policy upended the normal calculus of intelligence estimating. Through most of the Cold War, the tendency to overestimate Soviet military power arguably enhanced U.S. security, albeit at the cost of excessive defense budgets that may have exacerbated superpower tension. The stronger Washington thought the Soviets were, the more arms the Pentagon obtained, creating economic incentives for U.S. defense industries and the military. The stronger the U.S. military, the less likely it was to be challenged by the Soviets, who, for decades after World War II, had a vast advantage in conventional forces in Europe. While overestimating the enemy contributed to wasteful spending by the Pentagon, it also tended to reduce the chances of conflict. In the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration's preemption policy turned this formula on its head. For where the worst-case analysis tended to downplay the chances of conflict in the Cold War model, in the preemption model it guaranteed war, for it was precisely the enemy's capability that was given as the reason for going to war. The Bush administration was well aware of this dynamic. The CIA was not.

The Iraq War was largely a self-inflicted catastrophe. The Bush administration's fundamental mistake was its failure to realize that the world's most powerful nation cannot be, or be seen to be, the world's most aggressive nation. If it is seen this way, it tends to destabilize the U.S. position in the world by undermining the view of American power as a benign force for protecting weaker nations and intervening to thwart or shorten conflicts. This mistake existed completely apart from the deeply flawed execution of the war, and as that execution improved with painful experience, the initial flaw in the thinking behind the invasion remained unchanged. The U.S. adventure in Iraq was abetted by the abuse of intelligence by policymakers, an overeagerness to take aggressive action, flawed intelligence collection and analysis by the CIA, insufficient critical reporting by the media before the war, and inattention to the Bush administration's manipulation of intelligence by congressional Democrats, who, with access to classified material, were in a unique position to see the gap between what the White House was saying and what the intelligence community was reporting about Iraq.

The 9/11 catastrophe was enemy-inflicted, abetted by the neglect of intelligence capability in the early 1990s, the failure by intelligence leaders to focus analytic attention on the terrorist threat, the failure by overworked intelligence officers to fully appreciate the adversary's motivations and intentions, a reluctance—owing to past intelligence failures—to take military action

against that enemy, and the grandstanding of Republican lawmakers over a sex scandal to the neglect of real threats confronting the nation.

Despite these distinctions, the Iraq and 9/11 failures were linked. In late September 2002, as senior intelligence analysts were rushing to assemble the infamous National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, a joint committee of Congress was grilling the CIA on its lapses in recognizing the al-Qaeda threat in the years leading up to 9/11. Pressured by the Bush administration to provide intelligence in support of its war policy, lambasted by Congress for failing to uncover the 9/11 plot from a handful of disparate clues, and laboring under its own mistaken assumptions about Saddam Hussein's motivations and actions, the CIA was not about to dismiss the Iraqi threat within weeks of the first anniversary of 9/11.

The sixty-year history of the CIA is pockmarked with failures, whether botched or illegal covert operations, failures to warn of foreign invasions, or lying by Agency officers in testimony to Congress or to government investigators.[11] What made the post–Cold War period different was that the CIA, beset as always by the imperfections of its political leadership and liable to commit errors in an error-prone business, was operating with declining resources, declining power, and declining expertise all while its very reason for being was in question—and as new and even more challenging missions were emerging. It is, therefore, not coincidental that in the early 1990s, at a time when the CIA was charged with failing to perceive the decline of its longtime adversary, the Soviet Union, the Agency was blind to the rise of a new and deadly adversary, al-Qaeda.

A typical pattern in U.S. national security is for a major failure, or perceived failure, to be studied and investigated for the lessons it can teach, a backward-looking exercise that usually focuses on the events immediately in question, not links between intelligence failures in one arena and national security challenges in another. While such probes bring to light a great deal of information about institutional structures and processes that scholars can use in the study of intelligence, they tend to miss the links between seemingly disparate crises and controversies. The interconnectedness of intelligence failures is a theme that runs through this book. The underlying assumption of this analysis is that readers understand that massive intelligence failures preceded the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq. The purpose here is to analyze events in the years leading up to those failures to help put the failures themselves, and the intelligence organization that made them, into historical

perspective and to show the links between lower-profile intelligence controversies of the early post–Cold War period and the high-profile failures whose consequences we live with today.

In the case of 9/11, the CIA failed to uncover the target, timing, and perpetrators of an attack that it knew, in a general way, was coming. In the case of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, the CIA perceived a threat that was not there. It knew its assessments might be wrong, but decided that the "safe" course of action was to assume the worst. As a result, it helped the Bush administration justify a war that carried the nation headlong into a different disaster. In January 2003, two months before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, two intelligence community reports put together by Paul Pillar, then the CIA's senior Mideast analyst, warned the White House and Congress of the possibility of prolonged sectarian unrest in Iraq following the defeat of Saddam's regime. The reports predicted that al-Qaeda might set up terrorist operations in remote parts of Iraq. They cautioned that democracy would not take hold easily in a country accustomed to authoritarian rule. And they said that other states in the region would not abandon their weapons of mass destruction programs based on the military action against Iraq. But the reports were issued three months *after* Congress had already voted to authorize war.[12]

The study of intelligence controversies is a hazardous trade because the more recent the event, the more likely it is that vital documentary evidence remains classified. That applies to the events examined in this book. In part for that reason, I have chosen events of sufficiently high profile at the time they happened that they generated a considerable amount of public reporting and debate. The congressional investigations, inspector general's reports, press coverage, and scholarly writing on these events, along with the willingness of participants to discuss them, aided greatly in producing a coherent picture. But my purpose is not simply to revisit episodes that drew public notice at the time. Rather, it is to reexamine intelligence controversies through the lens of the post-9/11, post-Iraq-invasion world with an eye toward understanding how the intelligence community's own mistakes, along with the political and budgetary pressure exerted upon it, fueled the massive intelligence failures that so profoundly affect us all at the beginning of the new millennium. My topic, in other words, is not only the tremors that shook the CIA during this period, but more important, the aftershocks.